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ARMSTRONG STATE COLLEGE

JOHN SUTCLIFFE: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

A RESEARCH PAPER SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

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SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

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Much of the life of John Sutcliffe continues to remain a mystery. Except for a relatively brief span of time covering the late eighteenth century,¹ little evidence remains regarding the time he spent in Savannah and what he did while he resided here. The lack of physical evidence such as death records, obituaries, and estate records, in conjunction with a personal ad² and an "article"³ in area newspapers in the late 1780's perhaps indicates his departure from the area around the turn of the century.

The first is an ad placed by Sutcliffe in the Gazette State of Georgia in which he announces that he basically wishes to close out his affairs in Savannah and in fact gives evidence that he has already left the area. In the add Sutcliffe describes himself as being:

"... very desirous to close his affairs, requests all those indebted to himself, or John Sutcliffe & Co. to pay the same to Dr. John Irvine in Savannah; and all persons having any demands against him whatever are requested to leave the same as above".

¹ Virtually all of the physical evidence such as newspaper articles, evidence of service during the Revolutionary War, etc. dates from the 1770's and 1780's.

² /
Gazette State of Georgia. 20 April 1786, page 2, column 1.

³
Georgia Gazette. 17 November 1789, page 3, column 1.

The second mention of Sutcliffe in this respect is more of a notice than an article. It gives notice of his marriage to a Miss Barbara Gruber, apparently of Charleston, SC on Sunday November 5, 1789. There is little, if any, real evidence of Mr. Sutcliffe's presence in Savannah and the surrounding area after this.

What the record does indicate about John Sutcliffe is that at the very least he was a man of conviction and honesty, all the while embracing the spirit of capitalism⁴ with maybe even a slightly wry sense of humor thrown in.

In the first instance Sutcliffe placed an ad for the return of a horse which had wondered onto his property. The ad stated that the owner of the horse "... may have him again, on paying charges". In the latter instance, this time for a pettiaguer boat which had "Drifted to my plantation on Skidaway Island...", and once again Mr. Sutcliffe is more than willing to return the lost property, this time for the price of the advertisement which he had placed. This particular advertisement was also the best evidence of Sutcliffe's residence, that being a plantation on Skidaway Island.

It appears also that Sutcliffe was married at least twice, with those two times being within a relatively short period of time, and with the marriage to Barbara Gruber

⁴
Georgia Gazette. 28 June 1775, page 2, column 1.
Gazette State of Georgia. 10 May 1787, page 2, column 3.

being the second of the two. On or about the 26th of June 1788 he is reported to have married one Miss Elizabeth Gowdy⁵ in Christ Church Parish. This is less than one and a half years prior to his marriage to Miss Gruber, and the circumstances surrounding the short time period between marriages is unknown.

Most of what is known concerning the life of John Sutcliffe comes from documents relating to the Revolutionary War and his involvement in it. It seems evident that Sutcliffe owned and operated some type of general store and that he used this to both his and the Continental Army's advantage by supplying the armies with much needed food, horses, boats etc.⁶ Not only did Sutcliffe help to supply the rebel army, he served as an officer in it. On 3 February 1778, he was commissioned as a Captain and Deputy⁷ Quarter Master General in Washington's Continental Army. Further evidence of Sutcliffe's service in the Continental Army appears in Knight's Georgia's Roster of the Revolution which simply lists him as the Assistant Deputy Quarter Master General, but unfortunately give no other details

⁵ Gazette State of Georgia. 26 June 1788, page 3, column 1.

⁶ Allen Candler, ed., The Revolutionary Records of Georgia (Atlanta: State Printer, 1908), Vol. I, 182, 201.

⁷ Samuel Elbert, Order Book of Samuel Elbert Collection of the Georgia Historical Society, Vol. V (Savannah: The Morning News, 1902), 98.

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regarding his service.

What is clear is the reaction of the British government and those loyal to it with regard to Sutcliffe's activities as a rebel. In a letter to Lord G. Germain, British Governor Sir James Wright refers to Sutcliffe as a "Noted Rebel...going about Town, as if they had Never committed any the least Offence whatever...".⁹ Not only was Sutcliffe not making any friends among the Loyalists, he had his property confiscated by the British Government. The Georgia Treason Act of 1780¹⁰, the British Disqualifying Act of 1780¹¹, and various other Acts¹² proclaimed by the British Government all specifically mention John Sutcliffe and the confiscation of his property.

There is also record of Sutcliffe's involvement in the

⁸
Lucian Lamar Knight, ed., Georgia's Roster of the Revolution (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967), 429.

⁹
James Wright, Letters From Sir James Wright Collection of the Georgia Historical Society, Vol. III (Savannah: Savannah Morning News, 1873), 312.

¹⁰
Robert S. Davis, ed., Georgia Citizens and Soldiers of the American Revolution (State Historical Press, 1979), 68.

¹¹
Allen Candler, ed., The Revolutionary Records of State of Georgia Vol. 1 (Atlanta: The Franklin Turner Company, 1908), 348, 376.

¹²
Allen Candler, LL.D. A.M., ed., The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia Vol. XIX, Pt. II (Atlanta: State Printer, 1911), 152-154.

buying and selling of various properties in and around the
Savannah area.¹³ These various transactions list Sutcliffe
as having signed for another party with respect to their
having purchased a quantity of land. They may have been
either friends or perhaps slaves. Although it appears that
Sutcliffe owned a plantation it is uncertain whether or not
he owned slave.

The dates regarding Sutcliffe's birth and death remain
unknown, as does any direct evidence of offspring. There is
however record of the deaths of two other John Sutcliffes,
one who is most likely his father¹⁴, and the other probably
a son.¹⁵

¹³
Eve B. Weeks and Robert S. Lowery, ed., Georgia
Land Owners' Memorials (Danielville, GA: Heritage Papers,
1988), 182, 197, 204, 206, 220, 241.

¹⁴
Mary Boudurant Warren, ed., Marriages and Deaths:
Abstracts From Exant Georgia Newspapers Danielsville, GA:
Heritage Papers, 1968), 112. This lists the death of John
Sutcliffe Sr. in late 1775.

¹⁵
Georgia Society of the Colonial Dames of America,
eds., Some Early Epitaphs in Georgia (Durham: Seeman
Printery, 1924), 319. This gives the headstone reading of a
John Sutcliffe who died in 1822 at thirty-two years of age.

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